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THE ORIGIN AND THE RESULTS OF THE IMPERIAL FEDERATION MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND.¹

BY GEORGE BURTON ADAMS, PH. D.

During the last half of the present century, a great change has taken place in the feeling of the people of England in regard to the Colonies and the Empire. Before 1850, so great was the prevailing indifference that it was exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to arouse public opinion on any question of colonial policy. At present, scarcely any subject exists of greater interest to the mass of Englishmen. Before that date, and indeed for many years afterwards, the colonies were looked upon almost solely as sources of wealth to England, or as safely-distant places into which could be drained the superfluous, the destitute and burdensome, and even the criminal population of the mother country. Now, the conception of colonies as a mere commercial investment, or a kind of a social pest house, has entirely passed away, and the nation has come to realize that they are a source of wealth which cannot be entered in the ledger, and of moral health not measured in the statistics of crime. And the vision of new Englands in many regions of the globe, filled with prosperous and patriotic Englishmen, destined in the future greatly to exceed in wealth and numbers the parent state, is gradually changing also the idea of the Empire. Anglo-Saxon empire is coming to mean no longer, as it once did, mere geographical expansion or mere political conquest and rule, but rather the one race in all its scattered homes, united by pride in a common past, by the possession of a common civilization, and by common aspirations for the future. It is coming to mean less the territories which the Anglo-Saxon occupies, wherever they may lie on the map, than the political liberty and freedom of opportunity for all which he is there working out, or

¹ Biennial Address delivered before the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, February 22, 1899.

the training in the best of his possessions which he is imparting to inferior races.

This new idea of empire, as the united race and its common inheritance, has begun most happily to extend beyond England and her present colonies, and to take in us who once were colonies. It has led to the idea of the race as above the nation, of a kinship superior to artificial boundary lines, and was one of the chief causes of that helpful friendliness so often extended to us during our war with Spain.

A change so full of interest to us as this, and so fraught with the highest good to all the world (if it leads, as it may very likely do, to a common Anglo-Saxon policy, generously conceived and pursued in close alliance), is one of the most important that has ever occurred in history. What are the causes which have brought it about?

The subject to which I would invite your attention to-night, is the history of one of the strongest influences creating this new consciousness of race unity, the so-called imperial federation movement in England. While this movement was in the main confined to England, and was wholly concerned with the relation of England to her colonies, the new conception which it helped to create has not been so confined, and the recent expression of it to which I have just alluded has aroused among us something at least of a response, and may not impossibly lead to results which will give the imperial federation movement a direct bearing on our future history.

The question of the proper form of an imperial government, including in one system England and her colonies, is one that did not arise until long after the founding of the American colonies, but it has been more or less constantly discussed for a century and a half. It was the heavy expense of the long struggle with France, that first gave rise to the question whether the English parliament could not exercise more direct powers of government in the colonies than it had hitherto done. The answer which was returned to this question, we are not likely to forget. The stamp act and the tax on tea were clumsy experiments in imperial government, and led, with what they necessarily implied, to a result which England ought to have

anticipated had she remembered her own history in the seventeenth century, and recognized the fact that the American colonists were likely to preserve the spirit and insist upon the rights of their ancestors. In recent years the English people have come to do justice to the colonial cause, and to understand how much they themselves gained from our successful resistance to the will of George III. It is true also, that since England's return to a policy of self-government in the colonies, she has drawn from her experience in America a valuable lesson in present colonial government. But for almost a hundred years, the memory of the American Revolution exercised an influence upon the relation of England to her colonies unfortunate for both. This influence in some particulars I have attempted to trace elsewhere.¹ I shall refer to it here, only as one of the important causes of that feeling in the English official world in regard to colonial relations, which finally became so strong and so nearly carried out in practice as to bring about a popular reaction which led immediately to the rise of the idea of imperial federation.

The first effect of the American Revolution seems to have been a very general fear that a liberal policy in the government of the colonies would result in their throwing off their allegiance and proclaiming themselves independent, as the American colonies had done. Naturally, the English government determined to prevent the anticipated result, and naturally also, holding this belief, it sought to do so by maintaining a strict control of the colonies from the home office; for, as an advocate of this policy wrote in 1813, "it cannot be too often or too seriously pressed, that a firm adherence to a restrictive policy alone can secure the allegiance of the colonists and the advantages which they bring to the mother country."² This policy, applied to Canada, was one of the chief causes of the Rebellion of 1837; and it led to so plain an exhibition of the temper of the colonists that England was persuaded to abandon it, and free self-government was granted to Canada. The same

¹ *Report of the American Historical Association for 1896*, vol. i, pp. 373-389.

² Anonymous pamphlet, *Considerations on Colonial Policy* (1813), p. 14.

favor was granted a little later, and with some further hesitation, to the Australian colonies.

But, though the policy of strict government from home was dropped, the English official world was not converted from the belief that the colonies were destined to inevitable independence. The first result of granting self-government to them, was rather to strengthen this belief. It was the reigning opinion at the middle of this century, that in allowing the colonies to govern themselves, England had consented to the first steps towards independence, and that the experience which the colonists would gain in managing their own affairs would soon lead them to demand complete separation from the mother country. So reconciled did the public become to this view of the case, that it even came to be generally believed that the real object of colonial self-government should be to train the colonists in the conduct of government, as a preparation for future independence. This fact cannot be put more exactly than in the words of Mr. Arthur Mills, in the introduction to his work on colonial constitutions, published in 1856. He says: "To ripen those communities to the earliest possible maturity,—social, political, and commercial,—to qualify them, by all the appliances within the reach of a parent State, for present self-government, and eventual independence, is now the universally admitted object and aim of our colonial policy."¹ Says Lord Bury, afterwards Earl of Albemarle, in a work on colonial history published in 1865, speaking of the same fact: "So wide spread is this belief that our whole colonial policy is based on the assumption that our colonies will at some future time desire to become independent nations; and that we have learned the lesson taught by the war of American independence too well to prevent them even if we could."²

Interesting evidence of the extreme form of this belief is found in the fact that Lord Bury, in the work just quoted, and Mr. Thring, afterwards Lord Thring, a subordinate officer of the government, in a publication of the same year, both submitted plans to be adopted in advance, by which the independ-

¹ Mills, *Colonial Constitutions*, p. lxix.

² Lord Bury, *Exodus of the Western Nations*, ii, p. 17.

ence of a colony might be legally declared whenever it should wish, and the new nation launched upon its career with the blessing of the parent state.¹

While this belief was held by most public men, and by many writers on colonial subjects from the early part of the century, its influence was combined with that of another theory before it began to affect the practical action of the government. This was the doctrine that the colonies were nothing but a burden, and that it would be better for England to be rid of them.

It is impossible to trace here in any detail the rise and growth of this doctrine, interesting as it might be to do so. It undoubtedly had its origin, like the other idea, in the troubles of the American revolutionary period. Briefly stated by Adam Smith, just as the war was beginning,² and by Dean Tucker a little later,³ it received still more complete and striking development from Jeremy Bentham; in 1793, in a paper addressed to the revolutionary government in France, but not published at the time. After an interval of about thirty years, the idea again made its appearance, and this time apparently with some considerable popular support.⁴ It appeared in the reviews, and was heard in the House of Commons. A writer in the *Quarterly Review* of January, 1822,⁵ considered the notion prevalent enough to deserve an answer, and indicated its character by saying: "It may not be amiss to advert to some objections occasionally advanced against these dependencies altogether. It is sometimes insisted that colonies are burdens;

¹ Lord Bury's plan, given in his *Exodus of the Western Nations*, vol. ii, pp. 459-463, provided for independence by a treaty between England and the colony. Mr. Thring's plan was stated in a pamphlet which I have not seen, entitled *Suggestions for Colonial Reform*. As given by Lord Bury, *Exodus*, ii, 457, it provided for independence by royal proclamation.

² *The Wealth of Nations*, book iv, chap. 7.

³ See his pamphlet made up of letters addressed to Necker, entitled *Cui bono*, especially letters v and vi, and the postscript.

⁴ It was not possible within the limits of this address to discuss the relation of this idea to the movement for the removal of trade restrictions, nor of Cobden's to the free trade movement. I hope to give this part of the subject more adequate treatment on some future occasion.

⁵ Vol. 26, p. 523.

and that the wealth and strength of a country would be increased by seeking the productions of detached states and settlements of other countries." A few weeks later in the same year, in a debate in the House of Commons on a petition from Canada, Sir I. Coffin said: "It would have been a good thing for this country if Canada had been sunk to the bottom of the sea. It cost this country £500,000 per annum, and did not make a return to it of 500 pence. * * * The sooner the governor was called home, and the sooner the assembly and colony were suffered to go,—he should be sorry to say au diable,—the better."¹ In the next year the House of Commons listened to the same doctrine from Mr. D. Hume, who maintained that "it was obvious that the colonies, instead of being an addition to the strength of the country, increased its weakness."² In 1825 the *Edinburgh Review*³ said: "We defy anyone to point out a single benefit, of any sort whatever, derived by us from the possession of Canada, and our other colonies in North America. They are productive of heavy expenses to Great Britain, but of nothing else." And the next year the same *Review* added:⁴ "We have no hesitation in saying, that instead of being of any value to England, it would have been better for her, had Canada, Nova Scotia, etc., continued to this hour in the possession of their aboriginal savages."

I will not multiply these quotations, though it might easily be done; but it is especially interesting that Jeremy Bentham's tract, in which he had tried to persuade the French revolutionists to abandon their colonies, and which had remained for a whole generation unpublished, was put into circulation in England, for some reason, in 1830.⁵ A party advocating these views had already begun to form itself, and was no doubt encouraged and strengthened by Bentham's striking argument. It is to be noticed also that this tract was published just at the beginning

¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 2d series, vol. 6, col. 1076.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 8, col. 250.

³ Vol. 42, p. 291.

⁴ Vol. 43, p. 350.

⁵ *Emancipate your Colonies! Addressed to the National Convention of France, A^o 1793. Now first published for sale* (London, 1830). Included also in vol. iv of Bentham's *Works*.

of the most dangerous crisis in English colonial government since the American revolution — the culmination of the struggle in Canada. That danger was overcome, however, not by abandoning Canada altogether, according to the doctrine of this new party, but by a wise and generous yielding to her wishes, which speedily restored her shaken loyalty.

With the rise of the free-trade movement, this doctrine of the misfortune of possessing colonies received the powerful support of the Manchester school of economists and politicians, and especially of Mr. Richard Cobden. In both his speeches and his political writings he is continually recurring to the subject. Nothing but the foreign policy of England is so foolish and insane as her colonial policy. Cobden's view of the question is entirely that of the economist. His only standard by which to measure the value of colonies, is that of shillings and pence.¹ The fearful burden of taxes; the maintenance of an unnecessary army and navy; the enormous debt; the necessity of economy; the possibility of the fate of Spain overtaking the nation which is immolating its natural greatness on the shrine of trans-Atlantic ambition,² these are the reasons which he urges for an immediate dissolution of the Empire, and for abandoning the colonies to themselves, apparently without inquiring what their wishes might be in the matter. They are able, he says, to take care of themselves. Evidently no vision arose before his mind of a diminishing national debt and enormously increasing national wealth, going hand in hand with an undreamed of colo-

¹ "Three hundred millions of permanent debt have been accumulated, millions of direct taxation are levied annually, restrictions and prohibitions are imposed upon our trade in all quarters of the world, for the acquisition or maintenance of colonial possessions; and all for what? That we may repeat the fatal Spanish proverb — 'The sun never sets on the king of England's dominions.' For we believe that no candid investigator of our colonial policy will draw the conclusion, that we have derived, or shall derive, from it advantages that can compensate for these formidable sacrifices."—*Political Works*, vol. i, p. 26.

² "Spain lies, at this moment, a miserable spectacle of a nation whose own natural greatness has been immolated on the shrine of trans-Atlantic ambition. May not some future historian possibly be found recording a similar epitaph on the tomb of Britain."—*Political Works*, vol. i, p. 25.

nial expansion. One would like to know if he would still measure the value of Canada and Australia to England by the balance of trade alone.¹

Vigorous as was the argument of Mr. Cobden against the colonial policy of England, it was surpassed in frankness and completeness, near the end of his life, by a younger member of the Manchester school, Mr. Goldwin Smith, then Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford. He first published his argument in a series of letters to the London *Daily News* in 1862, and in the following year as a volume, with an introduction and some additions, under the title of *The Empire*. In the way of actual argument the letters contained but little that was new, except in relation to recent events. The reasoning was very largely that of Bentham and Cobden, but it was developed and enforced with all the remarkable dialectic skill of the author, and made attractive by the graces of his style.

From the appearance of the first letter, this skillful reassertion of the doctrine that England ought to look to her own interests alone, and lay aside all responsibility for the colonies, attracted much attention and led to much discussion both in England and in the colonies. Undoubtedly it strengthened the official class, especially the leaders of the Liberal party, in their belief that colonial independence was certain to come at no distant day. On the general opinion of England, in so far as it can be inferred from the press, it seems to have had an effect opposite to that intended by the author. It was interpreted as an attack on the integrity of the Empire, especially dangerous because so able, and it awakened a spirit of opposition and a

¹ A representative of the Manchester school has denied that they ever entertained a feeling of contempt for the colonies. This of course depends largely upon what one considers a feeling of contempt, and the colonies are hardly likely to have had the same view of the case as those who held the opinions of Cobden. Probably almost any one would admit, however, that the following words of Mr. Cobden, written in 1836, come near to proving the accusation: "The colonies, the army, the navy, and the church, are only appendages of our aristocratical government. John Bull has for the next fifty years the task set him of cleansing his house from this stuff." — Quoted from Geffcken, *The British Empire*, p. 53.

determination to maintain the colonial connection, which must be regarded as the first step towards the federation movement.

So long, however, as ideas of this sort were confined to theoretical writers like Bentham and Goldwin Smith, or to politicians accustomed to use extravagant language but not responsible for the actual conduct of colonial affairs, like Mr. Cobden, the sound public sense of England was not likely to take alarm. The letters of Prof. Goldwin Smith called forth considerable discussion in newspapers and reviews, in which the cause of the Empire was quite as ably maintained as the cause of disintegration; but for some years the debate remained purely academic. It was only when real anxieties arose regarding the safety or the loyal feeling of the colonies, combined with evidence that the ministry of the day were disposed to put these theories into practice and turn the colonies adrift, that the people of England were sufficiently aroused to make their feeling known.

Before the close of the decade in which Mr. Goldwin Smith's book appeared, two colonial questions had arisen which seemed to England of unusual importance, and which excited a general popular interest. The first of these was the defence of Canada against the danger to which she was believed to be exposed from the civil war then going on in the United States. The second, coming immediately on the heels of the other, was a prolonged and difficult war between the natives of New Zealand and the colonists. The special questions arising in the course of this war gave rise to a general discussion of the fundamental question—the proper attitude of the mother country towards her colonies.

It was a series of events, however, in the year 1869 and the early months of 1870, which revealed to the nation that the theories of the certainty of colonial independence and of the disadvantage of colonial possessions had gone much further towards a realization in actual facts than anyone had supposed. In the New Zealand native war, the settlers were having, as they thought, a rather bad time of it, and they had earnestly appealed to the home government for aid, but without effect. The use of imperial troops had been refused them; even the single regiment which had been stationed in the colony, was withdrawn

in the middle of the war. The colonists had been denied the guarantee of a loan to meet their military expenses, and finally they were rather harshly informed that the home government considered itself under no obligation to assist them. The British troops were also withdrawn from the Cape Colony, and the Australians were told that only one regiment would be left in that island. Canada was informed through Sir John Young, that she might have independence for the asking.¹ At a public meeting in London, Mr. Edward Wilson, "an eminent Australian, said, among other things, that a letter which he had received and which he read to the meeting, proved that Lord Granville's private views were in favor of a policy of separation between the colonies and this country."² That is, the secretary of state for the colonies was in favor of the dissolution of the Empire. In another meeting a few days later, Sir George Grey, lately Governor of New Zealand, said "that Lord Granville had intimated to one of the deputations on the subject of New Zealand, that if New Zealand wished to break off her connection with this country, and thought it would be for her own advantage to do so, there would be no objection."³

In August of that year, certain distinguished colonists in London issued an invitation to the leading colonies to send deputies to a conference to meet in February of 1870 to discuss the question of future relations between England and the colonies, and stated in the call that the government appeared to have announced as its policy "that (except to the extent of partial protection in case of foreign war with civilized powers) the mother country recognizes no responsibility for their welfare or safety nor any obligation to help them, even in circumstances of great danger and pressing need."⁴ To the meeting of this conference Lord Granville objected, and the London *Times*, in a leader on the call which had been issued for it, graciously in-

¹ *The Spectator*, Aug. 28, 1869, p. 1001.

² *Ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1869, p. 1383.

³ *Ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1869, p. 1414.

⁴ The invitation is dated Aug. 13, and is printed in the *Times*, Aug. 26, p. 9. Lord Granville's dispatch on the subject is dated Sept. 8, and is given in the *Times* of Dec. 17, p. 7.

formed the colonists that England could be called their mother country only in a historical sense, only in the sense in which Schleswig Holstein was the mother country of England.¹ These events were in 1869.

Early in 1870, Mr. Alexander Galt, a Canadian political leader, received the honor of knighthood from the home government. As he was at that time a public advocate of the policy of independence for Canada, he was criticised for accepting the honor. In defending himself, he said that when the offer was first made him he had informed the English government of his views on the subject of independence and had stated that if these views were inconsistent with the honor, he must decline to receive it. He had therefore drawn the inference that his views were in accordance with those of the British cabinet—an inference that would certainly need no argument when the honor followed such a declaration on his part.² Later in the year, in the Canadian Parliament, "it was openly stated by Sir Alexander Galt, Mr. Huntingdon, and other prominent members of the Assembly, that it was with unfeigned regret that they had come to the conclusion that it was the deliberate intention of Her Majesty's ministers to bring about a separation between the two countries."³ In Canada and in the Cape Colony, the royal governors publicly discussed the separation of the colonies from England as something quite within the range of probability.⁴

These facts, becoming known within the space of a few months, were a sudden revelation to the British public that the government of Mr. Gladstone was preparing to act upon the theories which had so long been taught, and to force upon the colonies the independence which they ought to desire.⁵ The

¹ *The Times*, Aug. 26, p. 8.

² *The Spectator*, Mar. 26, 1870 — vol. 43, p. 393.

³ *The National Review*, vol. v, p. 214.

⁴ *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. i, p. 810.

⁵ I am not here concerned with the question whether the government's intention was in every particular correctly interpreted — probably it was so only in the main, — but with the causes of the popular feeling which gave rise to the idea of imperial federation. Of these the newspapers and reviews are better evidence than the blue books.

effect of this revelation on the public was unmistakable. The judgment of the nation as a whole, which in the end controls the policy of cabinets and ministers, proved to be thoroughly sound when it was brought to face the question, not as one for debate merely, but as a practical one demanding immediate action. Aroused public feeling brought itself to bear on the ministry, in all the various ways which Anglo-Saxon public opinion has of making itself felt. There were letters to the *Times* and heavy articles in the reviews, and speeches and questions in Parliament. Public meetings were held for the enlightenment of the nation and the discussion of plans. There were deputations to the ministers, and protests from the colonies.

It was the New Zealand question on which public opinion centred as the one demanding immediate settlement, and it was on this that the victory was gained over the Liberal policy of dissolution. So evident and so decided was the general feeling, that it brought about a quick reversal of the ministerial policy in the matter. The New Zealanders were allowed the use of imperial troops, and their loan was guaranteed — first of five hundred thousand pounds, and then of a million. At the end of May, 1870, there was a leader in the *Spectator* on this sudden change of the cabinet's policy, which it called "the death-bed repentance of the colonial office," in which it said: "Ministers have changed their policy, have changed it abruptly, and have changed it for the best of all reasons — because they had begun to discover that their line was not the line of the people of England, and would, if pushed to its logical results, end in events which would bring down the bitter displeasure of the people of England."¹

It was in connection with these events that the first discussion of imperial federation arose, at least in such a way as to attract attention to it as a plan that might prove practicable. There had been some incidental and not very definite suggestion of the possibility of a federation between England and her colonies, as early at least as the controversies to which Prof. Goldwin Smith's letters gave rise, but such suggestions had

¹ May 21, p. 632.

attracted no general attention, and the idea seems to have been regarded as a pleasant speculation merely, useful for purposes of debate, but hardly likely to be put into practical operation. The following passage from the *Saturday Review* of February 15, 1862, may be taken as a fair specimen of these early references to the subject. It is a passage not without interest also, from the internal evidence which it affords of having been written during the American civil war. The writer, criticising Mr. Smith's idea of a friendly separation, says: "Certainly it is a bold assumption to take for granted the absolute certainty of a transaction [that is, friendly separation] the like of which had never been attempted since the world began. It would perhaps be less extravagant to imagine a continual approach on the part of England and her colonies to the realization of some idea of Federal Empire, which the democratic machinery of the United States has so signally failed to construct."

In the crisis of 1869 the subject was again referred to in a similar way, for purposes of debate, but with a greater definiteness and clearness which showed that, in the thinking of the nation at least, some progress had been made. In an article in *Frazer's Magazine* for January, 1870, in answer to objections, Mr. Froude wrote:¹ "Neither the terms of the federation, the nature of the Imperial council, the functions of the local legislatures, the present debts of colonies, or the apportionment of taxation, would be found problems hard of solution, if the apostles of *laissez-faire* could believe for once that it was not the last word of science." A few days before this article of Mr. Froude appeared, the *Times* said, in a leader on the colonial troubles: "Lord Granville and his colleagues are called upon to consider the whole subject, and either to extract a principle of government from the precedents they find recorded at the colonial office, or to throw over these traditions and devise a system of federal government without an example in the history of our Empire."² These quotations, it will be seen, indicate some thinking on the subject, but not as yet any tendency to urge

¹ Also in Froude's *Short Studies*, vol. ii, p. 173.

² *The Times*, Dec. 29, 1869, p. 6.

the actual adoption of a federal organization. This next step in advance was, however, immediately taken.

In January, 1871, an article was published in the *Contemporary Review*, entitled "Imperial Federalism." It was by Mr. Edward Jenkins, the author of a clever sociological satire called "Ginx's Baby." The publication of this article is usually referred to as the first definite date in the imperial federation movement, and as giving it a name. What Mr. Jenkins really did in inventing the name, was to put together two words, both of which had been in frequent use in the discussions of the preceding ten years, as in the passage quoted from the *Saturday Review* of 1862, where the expression is "a federal Empire." In doing so, however, he certainly coined a most effective term, afterwards used in the slightly different form of "Imperial Federation," and this helped to crystallize the ideas of the opponents of the government's policy and to form them into a party — no slight service at the time. This article and another¹ which followed in the April number of the same review, were the first extended discussion of imperial federation, which Mr. Jenkins treated not as a mere academic theory, as it had hitherto been regarded, nor as an impossible dream, but as a practicable plan which England must be persuaded to adopt, if the Empire was to be saved from impending dissolution. The articles are an impassioned and vigorous argument against the ministerial policy, and in favor of a close organization on the model of the federal systems in use in the United States and Canada. This was a more important service than the invention of a name, and Mr. Jenkins justly deserves the honor of beginning the imperial federation movement, as a movement with a definite aim and purpose.

It was four years, however, from the appearance of these articles before the proposal was taken up by any active politician as a measure with which he ventured to identify himself. During the interval, the subject received frequent discussion in public meetings and in the press,² and a new colonial question

¹ Entitled *An Imperial Confederation* — vol. 17, pp. 60-79.

² A sketch of the discussion of this time will be found in Young, *Imperial Federation*, pp. 68-70.

of the time also served to keep alive interest in the relation between home and colonial governments. This was the question of the annexation of the Fiji Islands, in which the English government seemed for a time, as the Australian colonists thought, determined to sacrifice their interests.¹

Notwithstanding increasing interest in the subject, the federation movement still lacked one most important support in the eyes of the average Anglo-Saxon. It had not as yet received the sanction, as I have said, of any one who could be called a practical statesman. As the *Times* said in 1884,² in a leader on the formation of the Imperial Federation League, speaking of the troublous times of 1869-70, "There were some even then who contended for the principles of a federal union between the mother country and her colonies, but the question was not regarded as a practical one, and it would have been difficult to induce any politician of mark to identify himself with a project which seemed likely to remain a splendid but impracticable dream." In other words, until taken up by some party leader whose political future might depend upon the cause he advocated, the federation plan failed to meet the test universally applied by all who speak the English language to every proposal — it was not practical.

This lack was at last supplied by Mr. W. E. Forster, the Liberal leader, who, in an address delivered in Edinburgh in November, 1875, announced his belief in the feasibility and wisdom of imperial federation, and urged it upon the attention of the nation.³ It may have been, as some one said later, that

¹ One point of interest in the debate on this question may be mentioned. The later fashion of denying or explaining away views not favorable to the Empire extended to Mr. Gladstone, but in his argument against the annexation of the Fiji Islands he comes very near to saying in explicit terms, he certainly implies, that the troubles which New Zealand had brought upon England were so great as to make the development of that most interesting and instructive of all colonies a public misfortune. One hardly knows in what terms to characterize such an opinion, and prefers to hope that Gladstone did not hold it.—See *Parl. Debates*, 3d series, vol. 221, cols. 1285-1286.

² July 30.

³ *Our Colonial Empire*, printed in full in the *Times* of Nov. 6, p. 10.

at the time Mr. Forster was walking in the dry places of opposition seeking rest and found Imperial Federation, but certainly the adhesion to the scheme of a statesman so popular and so universally respected gave the plan a dignity and influence which it had not before possessed. For a time, however, other public men seemed to hesitate to follow the example set by Mr. Forster, and no progress was made toward the actual adoption of a federal organization until early in the eighties, when the difficulties crowding upon the Empire in both foreign and colonial affairs created a strong, though apparently a temporary, current in favor of some immediate action.

The step then taken was the organization of the Imperial Federation League, and the circumstances which brought this about are very significant and lend much support, in my opinion, to the belief that if federation is ever adopted as the actual constitution of the British Empire, it is far more likely to be done in some moment of threatening danger, than as the result of any amount of discussion in peaceful times. These circumstances at home and abroad are best stated in the words of Mr. Greswell, a writer of note on colonial subjects.¹ He says: it was "a period of political unrest, agitation, and doubt. * * * Ireland, Egypt, and South Africa all contributed their share of anxiety at that time to the rulers of this country, and the English people themselves seemed to be walking along an endless valley of humiliation. Forces were at work which seemed powerful for evil, and in many places to make for rebellion, war and the disintegration of the Empire. The heart of the nation was touched to the core by the base desertion of Gen. Gordon in Egypt, and the ignominy was felt by our colonists to extend far beyond the frontiers of the Empire. In South Africa there had been an unparalleled record of disaster and disgrace, since 1879-80, and on the borders of the Transvaal, in Zululand, on the south west coast, and even in Kaffirland and Pondoland the good name of England had for several years been impeached. In Ireland the 'Cavendish' tragedy had for once stirred national sentiment to its utmost

¹ *The National Review*, vol. 14, p. 186.

depths and caused a tremor of apprehension to pass over the land. * * * Abroad and especially in the Pacific and along the African coasts there seemed to be indications on the part of France and Germany of taking advantage of England's extraordinary misfortunes and we heard of annexations in many unexpected places. The Congo conference was really a snub to England and Prince Bismarek guided, if he did not head, the German craze for a colonial Empire."

Already, early in the year referred to, 1884, some of the most devoted friends of imperial federation had reached the conclusion that the time had come for a forward step. They formed the plan of bringing together a conference of prominent men, without reference to party, but interested in maintaining the unity of the Empire, for the purpose of discussing the next move to be made to further the cause. This proposal received the hearty support of Mr. Forster, and a voluntary committee was at once formed to carry it out.¹ It was the feeling excited by the difficulties besetting the nation which have just been recounted that gave a general support to the idea of some immediate action, and it was in the spirit natural to such a time that the conference met at the end of July of this year. As described in the *Times* of the next day,² the conference "included representatives official, and unofficial, of all the more important colonies, and conspicuous members of both political parties at home. Mr. Forster was in the chair and was supported by Lord Roseberry, Lord Wemyss, Mr. W. H. Smith, Mr. Gibson, Mr. Stanhope, Sir Henry Holland, Mr. Cowen, Mr. Bryce, and other public men of every shade of opinion. Ex-governors of the principal dependencies of the crown, such as Lord Normanby, and Sir Henry Barkly, were there as well as military and naval officers of distinction to whom the defense of the Empire is a problem of the highest practical interest, and colonial High Commissioners and Agents-general and ministers in large numbers."

The result of this conference was the organization of the Imperial Federation League a few weeks later, with Mr. Forster as

¹ Labilliere, *Federal Britain*, p. 28.

² July 30.

its first president. On the death of Mr. Forster not long afterward, the Earl of Roseberry became its second president, and when he took office he was succeeded by Mr. Stanhope of the Conservative party.

In reviewing the work done by the league, and passing judgment on it, it is well to know just what it undertook to do, as stated in the resolutions adopted by the conference by which it was organized. The first of these declared, "that in order to secure the permanent unity of the Empire some form of Federation is essential." The second, declared the League organized "for the purpose of influencing public opinion, both in the United Kingdom and the Colonies, by showing the incalculable advantage which will accrue to the whole Empire from the adoption of such a system of organization."¹ It was in influencing public opinion, if not in proving the particular thesis, that the great work of the League was done. The very organization itself, by bringing together in support of the project so large a number of the leaders of both parties, went far to produce upon public opinion a decided effect.

Branches of the League were organized in different places throughout England and in Canada and Australia, while in South Africa a league which had already been formed for a similar purpose, called the Empire League, joined the alliance. A monthly journal was established, and named *Imperial Federation*, to advocate the measures of the League, which continued in publication for a time after the League itself had been dissolved. In 1887 the government, at the suggestion of the League, called a conference of colonial representatives to meet in London, which discussed questions of common interest, though that of federation was purposely excluded, and led as one result to the formation of the Australian naval squadron,—a beginning of colonial contributions to the permanent defense of the Empire. So successful was this conference, that two years later, in July, 1889, the League took steps to induce the government to call another; but Lord Salisbury decided that circumstances were not favorable to such a conference, and declined to entertain the

¹ Lord Brassey, *Papers and Addresses: Imperial Federation*, p. 8.

proposal. Two years later still, in 1891, a deputation of the League renewed the request, but Lord Salisbury again declined to issue the call. He suggested instead, that the League might perform a valuable service by drawing up a definite plan of federation for the instruction of the public.¹ In response, the League appointed a distinguished committee which formulated a somewhat general plan and presented it to Mr. Gladstone, who had then succeeded Lord Salisbury as prime minister.² Though the second conference desired by the League did not meet, the very useful conference of 1894, which was held in Canada, may be regarded as in part at least a result of its activity. These two precedents of successful conferences make it likely that others will be held in the future; and while they are hardly a step toward formal federation,—more likely on the whole to be an obstacle in its way,—they are of great service in maintaining and drawing closer the real unity of the Empire.

Other less formal efforts during these years to interest the public in the purposes of the League, might be mentioned, like the prizes offered for essays on the subject, by the London Chamber of Commerce, and the tour which Mr. Parkin, a Canadian by birth, and one of the ablest advocates of federation, undertook of all the principal colonies, to awaken interest by holding public meetings which he addressed.

After a few years of activity, it became evident that there were very decided differences of opinion among the members of the League as to the specific objects desired, and that efforts to advance any particular plan in the future would be very greatly embarrassed by these differences, even to the injury of the general cause to which all were ready to subscribe.³ So pronounced had these differences finally become, that the most devoted friends of federation were driven to the conclusion that the real purposes of the League would best be served by its dissolution.

¹ *Ibid.*, chap. vi.

² *Ibid.*, chap. viii. For text of the report, see appendix iv.

³ See an article on the dissolution of the League in the *National Review*, vol. 22, p. 814, and Lord Brassey, *Imperial Federation*, pp. 232, 234.

This was accordingly proposed in the spring of 1893, and formally accomplished in November of that year. Since that date there has been no organized body in existence whose object it is to further the adoption of an imperial federal government, and though the idea has been by no means abandoned, formal discussion of the subject has been less frequent. In a brief history of this movement, we may regard the dissolution of the League as the proper point at which to attempt a statement of the results which have been produced, though these have been to a considerable extent implied in what has already been said.

First and most important as determining all that follows, is the awakened public opinion, the increased interest of the mass of Englishmen in the colonies, of which I spoke at the beginning of this address. This must not be understood to be the work of the League alone. It was rather the result of a variety of causes. It was behind the popular reaction against the policy of the Liberal cabinet of 1869, and of that reaction the League itself was one result. The change in the national feeling would have taken place to a great extent if the League had never been organized, but the service of the League in this direction was very important. Its peculiar mission was to set forth a definite plan to be realized, and to urge its adoption by the Empire. A specific programme attracted wider attention than the mere expression of feeling or of personal judgment, however weighty. A practical object to work for, even if so difficult as the adoption of an untried system of government, created new interest and strengthened the feeling already existing. To deepen interest into that determination, which Englishmen and colonists alike now profess, that the unity of the Empire must be made permanent, and if necessary by some form of political organization, was chiefly the work of the Imperial Federation League.

With this change has come in a truer estimate of the value of the colonies to England, not as mere producers of wealth, but as an expansion of the race, almost as a component part of the nation. The feeling of the colonies themselves is better understood, and the bond of union between them and the mother country is stronger and truer than when the government at-

tempted to draw it more close by constant interference. Originating itself in a reaction against the policy of dissolution, the federation movement has made that policy impossible for the future. No government will ever again venture to go so near to forcing independence on the colonies, without reference to their wishes and unknown to the public, as did that of Gladstone. The old belief, indeed, in the certainty of colonial independence has practically disappeared, and with it the doctrine that England should strive to make herself wealthier and happier by throwing off all outside responsibility and by seeking her interests within the four seas alone.

The force of this public opinion has had its natural and legitimate effect upon the political parties. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of the Liberal party, most of whose leaders were at one time contaminated by anti-colonial theories. Now, only an occasional voice is lifted in that party in the old strain — never, I think, against maintaining the colonies, but only on the burden of Empire. In fact, so thoroughly has imperial unity come to be the policy of all England, that for many years, now, no practical difference in this particular can be distinguished in the public records of the two parties.

If there is no longer any danger of the dissolution of the Empire from the action of an English cabinet, one further result, in part at least, of the imperial federation movement is, that there is also no further danger of the sort from the action of the colonies. The colonists were never, it is true, possessed with that desire for independence which the dissolution theories took for granted. Occasional prominent advocates of that policy were to be found in some of the colonies about the middle of the century, like Dr. Lang of New South Wales and, for a time, Sir Alexander Galt of Canada, but their following was never large, and they would find even less to-day. While the colonists themselves were never active in support of imperial federation, except in individual cases, the discussion awakened their attention anew to the advantages of their connection with England, and revealed to them the strength of the feeling of imperial patriotism at home, and of pride in the colonies which they had not always had reason to suspect, at least from the

action of the government. One evidence of the new feeling of the colonies towards the Empire, especially significant because almost unknown in the past, is their greater interest in its defense and their willingness to make contributions to it, like the recent offer of the little colony of Natal to supply coal free of cost to Her Majesty's war ships that may call for it. If the time should ever come, it has been said, when the colonies desire imperial federation and ask for it, then it will be realized; and we may add, that it will probably not be until that time does come; but such a desire is likely to arise whenever a closer organization and a more centralized command of all resources seem to the colonies necessary to their safety.

The members of the Imperial Federation League did not succeed in answering all the objections which were advanced against their plan. Urged also, repeatedly, by their opponents to show why federation should be adopted, their only satisfactory answer was defense—a need not likely to be realized until it arises. Urged again to propose some practicable federal constitution,—as by Lord Salisbury in the instance mentioned,—they were able to answer only in general terms. But though the objections stand in the record of the discussion unanswered, no difficulty has been suggested which is not likely to prove in practice less of an obstacle than it seems in theory.

As a matter of fact, it is not the existence of objections, however serious, nor the inability of the League to formulate a feasible plan, which has prevented the actual adoption of a federal system. None of the objections so far advanced would be felt to be insuperable, if any urgent need existed of a federal government of the whole Empire. It is the absence of any such need, the feeling that the Empire is safe as it is, that no present improvement is to be made by the proposed change answerable to the possible inconvenience and difficulty of such an organization, that has prevented any experiment in actual federation. If an imperative necessity ever arises, Anglo-Saxon political genius, which has already created at least one great and successful federation in the face of obstacles as serious and without the light of experience to show the way, can be trusted

to overcome the difficulties and to form a single successful government of the Empire.

May I venture, in conclusion, to add a word of application to ourselves. Great as was the work of the federation movement, a greater remains yet to be done. The unity of the Anglo-Saxon race as a whole is a higher and nobler ideal for which to strive, than the unity of the British Empire, lofty as that conception is. To strive for the one, does not fall to us who are not citizens of the empire. The realization of the other is pre-eminently our work; and if it is ever accomplished it will be because we have willed it and determined that it shall be. Nothing that England can do will bring it about, except as her action may move us to decision. A single word of ours, like the word which we are told England spoke for us at the beginning of our war, would suffice, by its simple speaking, to establish a unity of the race, for the world would then know that danger to the least of our lands, or to any protected land, would bring the whole race forward in its defense. And this is all that is needed. A federal government is not necessary, nor even a formal alliance. Only a determined resolution, backed by ready power of action, that in the age which is now coming on, when the frontiers of the races draw together and a struggle between them, if it comes, will be the last and the decisive one of history—a determined resolution that in such an age our race shall act as one in behalf of a civilization which is one.

The old attack upon the Empire, whose history I have told, is past, but attacks have not ceased with the gaining of this victory. They are to-day no longer directed against unity and permanence, but against its morality. The cruelty and selfishness of conquest, the wickedness of expansion for mere trade, the demoralizing influence of ruling inferior races, these are the new charges, and the occasional voices lifted in this strain half a century ago have now become a full cry. The justice of these accusations no man can wholly deny. In the history of the British Empire there are many pages only to be read with shame. Our own history records a like story. If we are to undertake in the future still more difficult rule than in the past, we must acknowledge that in all probability we shall have



occasion to blush for many things. Of the beginning we need not be ashamed. A war of mere conquest is one thing. A war begun in the interests of humanity, which entails still further obligations, is quite another. In meeting these obligations, if we are honest with ourselves, if we use our best men, if our rule is more for others than for ourselves, the time will come when our work will be worth all that it may cost, and be so regarded by the world.

The chorus of these accusers is in itself a most hopeful sign. It could no more have been possible, one hundred years ago, than the new idea of race unity, or the steamboat and the telegraph, which make that unity actual. It is a sign of quickened and quickening conscience; and the man who joins the cry is performing, after his kind, a valuable service to the future. But surely that man is blind to his own times, who does not see that under this new attack the judgment and heart of the race are as sound as under the old. There is no determination which has grown so rapidly and so strongly in this nation in the last generation, and I believe the same to be true of England, as the determination to do justice ourselves to other men, to protect the weak, to check wherever possible the merely rapacious, and to hold our institutions, our civilization, and our religion in trust for all men. With this resolution at heart, the nation may make mistakes; it may be badly led; it may not always be able to distinguish between the mere scheming of the politician and the line of true policy; nor always know how to do what it does know should be done; it cannot in a generation free itself from selfishness and greed. If we embark upon empire, we shall not do as well even as England does, and we shall suffer, and those we rule will suffer in consequence. But we shall learn, and we shall, at no distant day, do well. We are now ready, as I believe, to go forward and to find our place in that empire of our race which, under Providence and with all of evil that it includes, is the greatest power for good in the world that history has ever known. If we do go forward, may God grant that it be with our old watchword on our lips, and its new meaning in our hearts — "The Union, one and inseparable."